

A large, stylized outline map of the African continent is centered on the page. The map is filled with a solid light brown color and has a thick, dark brown border. The text of the title is superimposed on the map.

Africa CSOs Position Statement on the Beijing +25 Review



*We, 212 representatives of women's rights and civil society organizations in all our diversities, drawn from across the 5 sub-regions of Africa and the diaspora, gathered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 28th–30th October 2019 to review the progress of implementing the **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action** (BPfA¹).*

Recognizing, that 25 years after the adoption of the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action \(BPfA\)](#), some progress has been recorded towards realizing women's rights in Africa. Notably, legal reforms to legislate and institutionalize women's rights in different aspects, for example the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) adopted in 2003 and now ratified by 42 countries. In addition, gender equality protection and the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sex is now entrenched in most national constitutions of AU Member States. There is also an increase in the enactment of laws targeted towards protecting women and girls such as labour laws and domestic violence acts, though enforcement of these laws remains a big challenge.

Concerned, that the legislative reforms in Africa has not altered relations of power between women and men. In most countries the status of women and girls remains largely unequal, with men and boys at all levels of society (both the private and public spaces) continue to enjoy patriarchal privileges while women continue to carry the burden of servicing an unequal society.

Sadly, manifestation of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination against women and girls in all their diversities has still persisted. Despite a number of women's rights commitments signed by African governments, normalized negative social norms, cultural and religious practices supersede national laws, overtly or covertly.

Noting, the 25 years review of the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action \(BPfA\)](#) is being conducted **against the backdrop** of an eroding pan-Africanism ideology; Africa's high dependency on foreign aid to finance development projects; increasing illicit financial flows; extractivism; unprecedented poor land governance, rapid unplanned urbanization, propagation of xenophobia, misogyny and extremism under the guise of nationalism and protectionism; migration crisis; militarization; totalitarianism and centralization of political and economical powers in the ruling class; shrinking civic space, freedom of expression and association; weakening trade union; financialization of social services; armed and unarmed conflicts; increased levels and forms of violence against women, girls, children and minority groups, including technology-related violence and femicides; recurrent disasters and extreme weather and climate crisis.

¹ The historic [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action \(BPfA\)](#) is a policy framework on gender equality and women's empowerment that was unanimously adopted by 189 countries during the 4th World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China in 1995.

Taken aback, with the realization that the review process of the Beijing+25 has in significant ways isolated women's rights organizations at national and regional level. Although, women's rights organizations were 'invited' they were not an integral part of the review from planning to reporting, resulting in fewer countries developing alternative (shadow) national CSOs reports.

We therefore DEMAND the following as our PRIORITY ACTIONS for the protection, respect, promotion, fulfillment and realization of women's and girls' human rights in Africa.

African Women's Priorities for Beijing+25

1. Gender Equality Legal Frameworks

AU Member States should:-

- ✚ Finance and accelerate the implementation of the various laws, policies and frameworks that have been adopted to address all forms of discrimination of women and girls and gender inequalities;
- ✚ Abolish existing discriminatory laws that entrench unequal power relations;
- ✚ Ratify, implement, finance and report on the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), without reservations;
- ✚ Establish and implement legislation and policies that effectively prohibit, prevent and penalize child marriage and harmful traditional practices including female genital mutilation;
- ✚ Enact and implement laws that protect women and girls in all their diversities in private and public spheres, especially reforming family laws to advance equality in marriage and prioritize civil/ birth registration;
- ✚ Ratify the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa which was adopted at the 30th Ordinary Session of the African Union Assembly in Addis Ababa on 30 January 2018;
- ✚ Ratify and implement ILO Convention 190 and Recommendation 206 to address gender-based violence and harassment in the place of work;

- ✚ Ensure the enforcement of laws that facilitate equal access to and control over land and all other productive assets by women in Africa.

2. Culture and Norms

AU Member States should: -

- ✚ Commit to challenge unjust power structures and social norms on the constructions of gender that validate harmful cultural, religious beliefs and gender stereotypes which legitimize and exacerbate the inequality of women and girls;
- ✚ Increase financial resources eliminating all forms of harmful practices in public and private sphere;
- ✚ Ensure that ending child marriage remains a national political priority, with the government investing in the development of a budgeted integrated national action plan providing for state level coordination mechanisms led by the government, including multi-sectoral and multi stakeholder coordination;
- ✚ Regulate and ensure media reinforce gender progressive agenda and not be used as a vehicle to promote stereotypes and gender inequalities;
- ✚ Strengthen institutional mechanisms so that lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and gender non-conforming (LBTIGNC) women and people report acts of violence against them in a safe and confidential environment, free from the fear of penalties or retaliation, and file charges.

3. Women's Leadership

AU Member States should:-

- ✚ Ensure representation and decision making of women in leadership and challenge norms that undermine and undervalue women's contribution and participation;
- ✚ Invest resources towards achieving the 50:50 gender parity representation requirements in both political and nonpolitical sphere as committed in the AU gender policy and other regional and global instruments;
- ✚ Review and reassess affirmative action to ensure it serves the intended purposes including ensuring women leaders elected/appointed through affirmative action have equal rights and responsibilities with other leaders;

- ✚ Ensure electoral processes are gender-responsive and eliminate structural, systemic and institutional barriers that hinder women aspirants and leaders, including violence against women.

4. Structural Transformation of African Economies

AU Member States should:-

- ✚ Promote women's land rights by the development of a clear roadmap for the implementation of the AU framework on the mechanization of agriculture in Africa. This includes compliance with African Union commitments to grant at least 30% of land to women by 2025 and full implementation of Kilimanjaro Charter of Demands. Importantly African government should launch a moratorium on foreign land acquisition and appropriation;
- ✚ Invest in agricultural mechanization as an indispensable pillar for achieving the Zero Hunger Vision by 2025, as outlined in the 2014 Malabo Declaration, Aspiration 1 of AU Agenda 2063 and Goal 2 of the Sustainable Development Goals;
- ✚ Take responsibility to address, mitigate and build resilience towards the climate change crisis. This should include making available adaptive technologies for women and adequately resource disaster preparedness systems;
- ✚ Invest in agriculture especially food production to minimal of 10% of the national budgets as per 2003 Malabo Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security in Africa and the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) to ensure women food producers have resources, they need to enhance their productivity and attaining food security;
- ✚ Ensure extractive resources are extracted with respect of environmental norms and rights of communities to free, prior and informed consent to ensure women's self-determination as well as women's access to income from extractive sector in order to eliminate women's poverty in extractives zone;
- ✚ Halt the exploitation of small scale farmers especially women living in the rural areas in Africa from the influx of poor quality inputs, large scale acquisition of land by foreigners and agricultural based markets;
- ✚ Adopt progressive tax systems that resources social services (including education, health & social protection);
- ✚ Implement in full gender budgeting and adopt national action plans that prioritize women's rights service delivery outcome;

- ✚ Ensure decent and dignified work to women, including promoting equal pay for equal work and social protection and health care coverage, especially for women in informal sector and unpaid care workers;
- ✚ Recognize burden of unpaid care work and put in place a fiscal care policy to guide investments that will reduce and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work that disproportionately affects women and girls;
- ✚ Address regressive taxation that greatly infringes on women carers and women in informal and rural settings who are at the center of the tax puzzle when it comes to taxation on household items like energy, water etc.

5. Democracy and Good governance

AU Member States should: -

- ✚ Embrace and reinforce the ideals of democracy especially right of association and freedom of speech;
- ✚ Refrain from dismantling and shrinking existing civic spaces and should reverse all legislation and actions that have closed space for citizens, particularly for women and girls;
- ✚ Ensure fair and safe electoral processes, which guarantee women's meaningful participation free of all forms of violence and electoral injustices;
- ✚ Recognize and invest in unique needs of women and girls in crisis, conflict and humanitarian situations, particularly provide adequate sexual and reproductive health services and rights. With a number of African countries experiencing civil conflicts, wars, humanitarian disasters and violent conflicts, rising vicious crimes including sexual violence and rape become "brutal weapons of war" due to the unjust and patriarchal societies, where misogyny lives in peacetime as well as in war-time;
- ✚ Invest in evidence-based policy formulation and planning by strengthening a pluralistic ecosystem of gender data management, including collection, systematic analysis and dissemination of quantitative and qualitative sex and gender disaggregated data in order to effectively monitor and evaluate potential disparities in access to social services with full respect to confidentiality and privacy.

6. Leaving No one Behind

AU Member States should:-

- ✚ Review and strengthen national frameworks on gender and disability to ensure equitable representation of women and girls with disabilities in every aspect;
- ✚ Ensure all public offices and buildings are accessible to people with disabilities;
- ✚ Ensure that women, girls, indigenous communities, people living with differentiated abilities who live in poverty and margins of development are at the centre and in leadership of development projects and programs at national and regional levels;
- ✚ Annul legal provisions that discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or body diversity, including laws that directly or indirectly criminalize lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and gender non-conforming (LBTIGNC) women and people.

7. Technology and Innovation

AU Member States should:-

- ✚ Promote and invest in women innovators by facilitating women techpreneurs to access markets and tailor-made financial services;
- ✚ Invest in technological innovation to enhance the efficiency of the public sectors, especially in health (to reduce maternal and infant mortality and management of lifestyle diseases) and in the education sector (to reduce drop out and increase transition);
- ✚ Decolonize the internet by making deliberate efforts and investments to ensure Africans own the internet and they are active content creators. The internet must be by and for Africans especially women;
- ✚ Provide legislative frameworks that uphold human rights approach to addressing online harassment and technology-related violence against women, girls and sexual minorities such as cyberstalking, online harassment, cyber-bullying and privacy invasions.



Conclusion

- ♀ In conclusion, we reaffirm that women's rights and civil society organizations are not and will not be the enemy of the state.
- ♀ It is important for African governments to acknowledge and embrace the role of women's rights and civil society organizations across the continent in building and nurturing inclusive and sustainable development.
- ♀ 25 years after Beijing, which was largely influenced by feminists, women's rights and civil society organizations, African women and girls in their diversities should not be invited as guests in national, regional and global platforms but have a seat on the decision-making table as equal partners.
- ♀ In that spirit we call on African Union member states to adopt, deliberate and recommit to advance women's rights as prescribed in the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action in the upcoming 33rd and 34th Ordinary session African Union Summits in 2020.

2020 is a DECADE OF ACTION! African Union Member States must honor, finance and be accountable to progressive women's and girls' human rights commitments!

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The African Women's
Development and
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